# SPINNER WINNER

**We have never published a full review of the 2012 Sound+Image award-winning Blu-ray player from Yamaha. Let's put that right...**

## Yamaha BD-S671 Blu-ray player

**Price: $349**

Yamaha has had an interesting range of Blu-ray players over the years. It is one of those companies (and it is by no means the only one) that has used Blu-ray tech from other companies at its players' cores, tweaking them to best work in a Yamaha system. The first Yamaha player I looked at was clearly based on Panasonic, for example, with similar menus and functions. The next two, a couple of years later, were based on the Sharp platform.

But what about the Yamaha BD-S671? The menu system had hints from here and there, but there was nothing readily identifiable. In the end it was the usability features — the top-of-class usability features we should add — which provided the hint, and made this the best Yamaha Blu-ray player yet.

## EQUIPMENT

As Yamaha's entry-level unit, those features don't make for exciting headlines, so it looks pretty much to be a basic Blu-ray player. Of course it does everything you'd expect, supporting BD-Live and BonusView, outputting at 1080p/24, upscaling DVDs to 1080p, delivering high definition audio as a bitstream or decoded to multichannel PCM. Most importantly, it also supports Blu-ray 3D.

And of course, a Yamaha entry-level player is rather more substantial than a typical entry-level player. It weighs a full three kilograms and is elegantly finished, except perhaps for the front USB socket which sits exposed.

At the back the twin-pin power cord is removable, and there is component and composite video and stereo audio. Both forms of digital audio output are provided. Most of these will be eschewed in favour of the HDMI output. Wi-Fi is not supported, so you will need an Ethernet connection to use the advanced network features. There is another USB socket at the rear. It is up to the user to supply the persistent storage required for BonusView and BD-Live operation — just plug a 1GB or more USB memory stick into this back USB (the front USB is also supported, but this would be a perilous location for permanently attached memory in most cases). The stick can be formatted suitably by the player.

The remote control is cleanly laid out, if a little plain in styling. The player also supports Yamaha's iPhone/iPod touch control app. This also works on the iPad.

Component video output is limited to 480i/60 and 576i/50 from Blu-ray, thanks to silly Blu-ray rules. Note: it will deliver 480p/60 and 576p/50 when playing back DVDs — another silly consequence of these rules!

## PERFORMANCE

In one regard, it seemed at first as if this player was like a throwback to the early days of Blu-ray players: it was very slow to get its disc tray open when it was in standby mode. Pressing the 'Open/Close' key on the unit to fire it up left me standing there with disc in hand for 24 seconds waiting for the tray to open. Unlike last year's Yamaha Blu-ray players, there is no 'Quick Start' mode, not that such a thing is actually necessary with sensible design.

But after writing most of this review, I swapped this player out in favour of Yamaha's higher-cost BD-A1010 player, which in so many ways is similar to this one. One difference was that the BD-A1010 opened its tray in eight seconds, not 24. A week later I switched out the BD-A1010 and returned this player, and lo and behold it was also opening its tray in eight seconds. There had been no firmware update. So that's a puzzle; the good news is that it performed consistently in this way for the remainder of the review period.

Otherwise, the player is a fairly speedy performer anyway. It loaded my standard test discs in times only a few seconds longer than

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the record holders — 18 seconds for the dual-layer disc without BD-Java, 21 seconds for the single-layer disc with BD-Java.

We'll return to disc spinning shortly, but first let's look at new media support.

One of the cool things about consumer technology is that at the same time that it is getting cheaper, it is getting more powerful. So with this unit, which is available for not that much more than a budget player, you get full service DNLA support. By full service I mean that you get photos and video along with music. Likewise you get all three media types from USB devices. The formats supported include MP3 and standard WMA for audio. Yamaha says WAV in the manual, but standard CD-quality WAV files wouldn't play for me. For photos you get JPG and (although not stated in the manual) PNG. Video includes DivX (although my standard clip wouldn't play) and WMV. It also played my SD and HD MPEG2 clips, and AVI.

The video playback was nicely implemented in the sense of being treated the same as disc video. The unit's deinterlacing circuitry treated this content with respect, attempting to process it according to its film or video status. This is how multimedia video ought to be treated, but so often isn't.

The other network-media based offering it provides is YouTube video. This was a strange implementation. On first start-up it dropped me full screen directly into clip called 'SHOPPING CENTERS!' which was some kind of comedic X-rated rant of which every third word was of four letters and starting with 'F' or 'C'. This seemed to be on the Most Viewed list when I checked with my computer. Thus are the perils of random access to YouTube — I'm not sure autoplay is a particularly good idea. Be ready to hit the 'STOP' key when you first go on, then you can press the up arrow to search or the down arrow to browse by category.

Now when it came to playing discs — Blu-ray and DVD — this player is about as good as it gets, and is far better than last year's Yamahas. About the only criticism on this front is that it would be nice if it read ahead and buffered dual-layer DVDs so that it could perform seamless layer changes with them. But at about half a second, the pause is barely noticeable anyway.

Regular 1080p/24 Blu-ray content was delivered beautifully over HDMI, which is pretty much what you expect with any Blu-ray player. The bigger challenge is with Australian 1080i/50 Blu-rays and Australian 576i/50 DVDs. Encouragingly, within the player's set-up menu it had a choice to set deinterlacing mode to Auto, Film or Video. On DVD the Auto mode performed some cadence detection that worked reasonably well, although it was tricked by some of my torture test clips. On 1080i/50 Blu-ray, the cadence detection seemed quite out of action on two of my three test clips, but then worked perfectly on the third.

All imperfections there, though, were easily forgiven because the Video and Film modes lived up to their names. They weren't mere suggestions but acted forcefully. Film mode in particular wove fields together to make frames, come what may. If you're watching 95% of PAL DVDs or 1080i/50 Blu-ray discs (e.g. *Pulp Fiction*), just select this and you will get perfect performance.

Other nice capabilities were the effective audio decoding of HD channels to PCM, even when secondary audio was in operation. Oddly, though, this did downconvert 6.1-channel DTS-HD Master Audio to 5.1-channel PCM.

There are also nice information displays, including an audio bit-rate display on 'On Screen' menu!

So what kind of player is this unit based on? As mentioned, there was nothing obvious in the menus to tie it in with any other player, but there were clues. The transport controls were one such: the player's controls were excellent. There were five fast-forward and five fast-reverse speeds, and four slow-forward and four-slow reverse speeds. Note, those slow reverse speeds worked on Blu-ray as well as DVD, which is a rare feature in Blu-ray players (only Sony, high-end Pioneer and one other range offer this). Likewise for frame stepping: both forwards and reverse are available. That makes it much easier to find that exact frame you wish to examine closely.

There are also a full range of 'Repeat' functions which work on DVD and Blu-ray, including A/B repeat.

But what really narrowed things down was a last extremely rare capability: the 'Setup' menu can be popped up over the top of the video as it is playing. You can change video resolution and quite a few other settings — including the deinterlacing mode — on the fly without interrupting playback. (Unfortunately the audio settings are blocked in this mode.)

## CONCLUSION

Still, that capability nailed it: while not based on any particular brand, it does seem to be based on the same generic platform upon which the Cambridge Audio and Oppo Digital players are based. Since these are both highly reputable brands that sell for prices nudging a thousand dollars, the Yamaha BD-S671 is not only a fine player, but exceptional value for money. *Stephen Dawson* +

### VERDICT

**Yamaha BD-S671 Blu-ray player**

**Price: $349**

- Perfect progressive scan conversion available
- Excellent transport controls
- Can change some 'Setup' options while play continues

- DVD layer change not seamless
- No Wi-Fi
- Component output limited to SD

**TEST FIRMWARE:** 1.2505
**OUTPUTS:** 1 x HDMI, 1 x component video, 1 x composite video, 0 x S-Video, 1 x optical digital audio, 1 x coaxial digital audio, 1 x stereo analogue audio
**OTHER:** 1 x Ethernet port, 2 x USB, 1 x Remote In, 1 x Remote Out

**DIMENSIONS (whd):** 435 x 86 x 257mm
**WEIGHT:** 3.0kg
**WARRANTY:** Two years

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